

Dear Chairpeople and Members of the Housing Committee,

I write to support HB 6659 Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed FY 24- 25 Budget for Conservation & Development Agencies.

I am a resident of Hamden and a case manager at the Columbus House.

I assist clients in both obtaining and maintaining housing, complete six month and annual DMHAS assessments, collaborate with clients in developing service plan goals every six months, and serve as a bridge in connecting clients with mental health, substance use, financial and community resources to adequately address their needs and crises.

I am here today in support of the raised HB 06659. To eliminate the harm of homelessness, we have a commitment to address it as what it is, a dangerous crisis. It is vitally important that we use tactics of consistency and safety, as we assist those who are and have been in the most vulnerable situations. Sustainable funding towards homeless response workers and nonprofits is essential. Our work, our passions, and specifically our incomes rely heavily on guaranteed government funding. Case managers are currently burdened with the financial instability their incomes cause, leading many to either leave the profession, or be forced to work multiple full time jobs, causing quick burnout. Sustainable funding to homeless response workers will increase incentives for long-term employment in this field as well as reduce burnout and outside stressors. I have witnessed housed clients have their goals and progress delayed because they were unable to receive the resources, they need to improve their independence and growth. One example of this is a single mother living in New Haven. She has not had consistent case management for over a year and informed me that I was her fourth case manager in eight months. She is in desperate need to move, as her apartment conditions are extremely poor, failing inspections six times, and increasingly expensive, where she is now in a position where she cannot afford rent. This issue has been present for almost a year, but without the case management she needed, she was unsure of how to begin the moving process appropriately. She has since lost her job, receives no financial or government assistance, and is in a financial crisis. When consistent case management is not accessible to the individuals who need assistance the most, it can result in the inability to progress, address needs and achieve goals with proper assistance. Clients experience emotional burnout from having to re-explain and restart progress, lose trust in the services we offer, and like the story of the woman detailed, experience neglect and prolonged crises. This is an issue that can be addressed by allocation of funds to homeless rescue workers and nonprofits.

As a case manager at the Columbus House for eight months now, I personally have witnessed the other case manager position in my program be filled by two separate individuals, and we are currently looking for our third case manager to fill the position. This inconsistency greatly affects the clients, but also case manager's like myself. I am now working with two caseloads that are at capacity and am only being compensated for the responsibility of one. Please understand this story and situation is not isolated. Taking on the burden of other caseloads because of constant turn over has become a terrible normalcy among homeless response agencies. We are overworked, overwhelmed, understaffed and underpaid. These situations make



it difficult to address each of our client's needs with patience, care and consistent attention. We are unable to serve your most vulnerable constituents in the most effective manner.

I want to be clear, that this is not an organizational issue, but a systemic issue among many extremely established, organized programs that simply cannot continue to attempt to meet a demand that is lacking adequate money supply, and this is coming at the detriment of its employees and the people you are equipped to serve.

Our clients are competing in markets and housing pools that are extremely onerous. While the assistance of RAP vouchers greatly assists our clients in receiving adequate housing, there are financial barriers that the housing market presents that lengthen the time our clients experience homelessness. This can be addressed through investment in a flexible funding subsidy pool. The individuals that I work with are in desperate need of housing but have life experiences that are used against them. The social and mental circumstances of our clients increase the chances of them being denied housing. This, combined with financial incapability to keep up with high application, security deposit, and rent costs leave my clients, and myself with little faith and level playing fields. Assisting with the financial issues that make it difficult for our clients to be given a chance of obtaining housing will lower the number of individuals experiencing long term homelessness. An investment in a flexible funding subsidy pool will provide us with the incentives for landlords, in the hopes that it will encourage them to give our clients the chances they are deserving of. It can assist clients in obtaining security deposits and application fees, so that they are not limited more than they already are to finding sustainable, safe, and adequate housing. This can only happen with full funding of the homeless response sector.

We are asking you to stabilize our system, please consider these stories, and our requests.

Thank you,

Hope Hammond